



WASHINGTON WATCH

By Chris McConnell and Paige Albinak

Ergen strays too far

Regulators have hit Charlie Ergen's EchoStar with a \$40,000 parking ticket. Tempo Satellite, a TCI Satellite Entertainment



Ergen

subsidiary, had charged that EchoStar was not keeping two of its satellites in their assigned orbital parking lots. Regulators looked into the complaint and found that, indeed, the EchoStar 1 and 2 satellites were hovering more than 0.2 degrees away from their assigned spots. The result: a \$20,000 "notice of apparent liability" for each violation. Loral SkyNet handled the satellite station-keeping, but EchoStar gets the fines because it holds the satellite licenses.

Free airtime supporters

Now that he has backed down from legislative threats to hold his agency's budget hostage over the issue, FCC Chairman Bill Kennard is getting a little congressional support for an initiative on free political airtime. "The Federal Communications Commission has the responsibility under law to determine the nature of broadcasters' obligations to serve the public interest," more than

40 House and Senate members wrote Kennard last week. "We urge you to move ahead expeditiously with a notice of inquiry." The commissioners have been reviewing drafts for such an inquiry and hope to launch the fact-gathering effort this summer. Kennard earlier had planned to propose a requirement that broadcasters provide free political airtime but has since agreed to merely gather information on the issue for now.

Thanks but no thanks

Tempo and DirecTV, meanwhile, have sent permits for a batch of unused DBS channels back to the FCC. DirecTV secured 27 channels at the 157 degree west orbital slot in 1991, while Tempo was given 11 channels at the 166 degree west slot in 1992. Neither orbital location allows a satellite to broadcast to the entire continental U.S., and neither has since been used by the two companies.

Ness talks TV diversity

Elsewhere in the FCC, Commissioner Susan Ness this month lamented the departures by high-ranking female media executives. Speaking to a Louisville, Ky., gathering of American Women in Radio and Television, Ness cited Geraldine Laybourne's departure from ABC as well as Lucie Sallahany's exit from UPN and Kay Koplovitz's departure from USA Networks. "I

am concerned by the lack of successors for these management stars," Ness said. "There are so few women at the top, these announcements appear to deplete the ranks."

But maybe the good news is that the women are opting to build their own enterprises, Ness added. She hopes that the



Ness

FCC will prevail in its effort to overturn a court decision that held the agency's equal employment opportunity rules unconstitutional.

Hostetter wins waiver

Down the street from the commissioners' offices, regulators in the Cable Services Bureau have decided to give former Continental Cablevision chief Amos Hostetter a waiver of FCC restrictions on common ownership of local cable systems and TV stations. Hostetter is a trustee of the WGBH Educational Foundation, which holds licenses for three noncommercial Massachusetts TV stations. Hostetter also will hold an 8.5% stake in MediaOne (formerly Continental Cablevision) once US West spins off the cable unit this summer. Because

MediaOne cable systems fall within the broadcast signal of the three stations, FCC rules bar the systems from carrying those signals unless Hostetter resigns from the foundation. Hostetter said the FCC should waive the rule because he is a passive investor in MediaOne and the stations are noncommercial.

DC Truman screening

Some of Washington's TV news celebs turned out at the Motion Picture Association of American headquarters last week for a chance to watch their medium take it on the chin in "The Truman Show." The movie features Jim Carrey as a man trapped inside a giant studio where his entire life is observed and broadcast as a hit TV show. On hand for the dinner and screening: ABC's Cokie Roberts, NBC's Tim Russert and PBS pundit Mark Shields. Also attending was McLaughlin Group host John McLaughlin, who pressed MPAA President Jack Valenti on how the movie's opening weekend gross stacked up against the industry's record (held by "Titanic").

But it's still WCA

And finally, one of the Washington telecom lobby's favorite contradictions in terms is no more. The Wireless Cable Association is changing its name to the Wireless Communications Association. The group hopes that the new name will more closely identify its members as providers of two-way services, such as Internet access and local telephony. Attorneys for the association are petitioning the FCC to let WCA members offer such services and are hoping for a thumbs-up this summer.